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HISTORY AND PRESENT STATE OF  
BRISLINGTON HOUSE

NEAR BRISTOL.

*An Asylum for the cure & reception of*  
INSANE PERSONS.

ESTABLISHED BY EDWARD LONG FOX M.D. A.D. 1804.

and now conducted by

*Francis & Charles Fox M.D.*



THE LODGE.

Exinde per amplum

Mittimur Elysium . . . . .

Donec longa dies perfecto temporis orbe

Concretam exemit labem. *parumque* reliquit

Aetherium sensum . . . . .

An d. Lib VI.

BRISTOL.

LIGHT and RIDLER

1836.





## CHAPTER I.

THE extensive alterations and additions that have been made in the Lunatic Asylum at Brislington, rendered it necessary some time ago to submit a new plan of this establishment to the magistrates of the county of Somerset. This plan, with more copious details than were originally published, it had long been the intention of the three proprietors of this institution to bring before the notice of their medical brethren, and of all persons who take any interest in the means that are used for the relief of the insane: various reasons, however, have prevented this step, until one of them (the original projector of the concern) has terminated his long and useful life. The surviving proprietors, who were for many years engaged with their late father in the care and cure of the insane, no longer delay the publication of the annexed plan; with a few explanatory remarks upon the management of their patients, which perhaps may be found generally useful and interesting. They feel also that it is due to themselves, as well as to those parties who may entrust patients to their care, to make known their intention of conducting this asylum upon the same principles as have already succeeded in gaining for them so great a measure of public confidence.

It is a matter of primary importance to all parties, that these principles should be accurately defined and faithfully acted upon. But especially to the proprietors themselves, who are sensible that great abuses have formerly existed in houses devoted to the care of the insane, and that the public mind has been prejudiced against the whole system of lunatic asylums, by the detail of some cases of ignorance and of cruelty. It is satisfactory to reflect, that not only is the legislature much more vigilant in its supervision of these establishments, but that the principles of moral and medical treatment to which the insane are now subjected, in those lunatic asylums that possess any character, have undergone most important alterations within the last few years. It was at one time a common belief, that intimidation was the only means by which lunatics could be governed and even cured; and it is a matter of

history, that their attendants were in the practice of relying upon corporal punishments and personal restraint, as the most suitable means of maintaining the necessary discipline. The individuals who were committed, either to public or to private asylums, had to endure all the evils that are obviously attendant upon such a society being drawn together within a building not purposely erected for their accommodation. Among some of the bad consequences of such a situation, were the commixture of the sexes, of the curable and of the incurable, of the convalescent and the violent. Before the erection of the present building, the original proprietor had for several years conducted an asylum, which like many others of the present day, was originally the residence of a private family; and although his success was equal to that of any of his cotemporaries, and the accommodations as good as those of any private asylum that he had seen, (and he had visited some of the most celebrated in Europe,) he was so convinced of the necessity of better classification, and of other requisites, that he devoted himself to the erection of the establishment at Brislington, which is believed to have been nearly, if not quite, the first private asylum that had ever been built purposely for the reception of the insane.

The situation which was selected for this building was in the centre of a recently enclosed common, nine miles from Bath, and three miles from Bristol; where the proprietor could not be incommoded by neighbours, and to which his taste gave an imposing appearance, having laid it out in diversified walks and extensive plantations, that afford shelter and security from all intrusion. The asylum is thus placed in the centre of what is now become a well wooded estate; which with the addition of a farm, rented by the proprietors, comprises more than two hundred acres of elevated ground.

The buildings extend in front upwards of five hundred feet; the whole of which, except the centre house, is enclosed in a wall, forming on its inside a communication to the lateral houses. By this arrangement the door of the centre house is the only means of entrance or of exit, and there a porter constantly attends, who keeps the keys of the different divisions; so that the patients can never be left by their servants without his cognizance. A wall carried through this centre house, as well as through the range of baths, and the airing grounds, constitutes a partition between the sexes; and to ensure this object, there is a distinct stair-case to each of the divisions of the centre house, which, with the two larger houses on either side, are the ordinary residence of the patients.

The smallest house on either side is for such persons of the respective sex, who, having some bodily disease superadded to their mental affection, require different accommodations as to quiet and regimen, or may demand an exclusive treatment to















prevent contagion, By this arrangement the divisions of the establishment, for the accommodation of the patients, amount to eight; four being allotted to the male, and four to the female patients; and by these precautions all communication between the sexes, or between their servants, is effectually prevented. To obviate all danger from fire, the stair-cases, doors, joists, and window-frames are made of iron; and the floors of a composition of stucco and plaister of Paris. The windows are not barred, nor are the apartments darkened with lattices, but a painted iron Venetian blind is fixed on the inside, which, without impeding the light, accomplishes all the ends required.

The patients of each sex are arranged, according to their rate of payment, in three classes; each of which inhabits a distinct house, detached from the others by a considerable interval. The public sitting rooms, of which there are two for each class, one for the more violent, and the second for those who are approaching to convalescence, are chiefly upon the ground floor, and admit of free access to separate airing grounds, for the exercise of the patients. An arcade extends throughout the length of each of these courts, affording exercise in wet weather: and although the airing grounds are all enclosed by lofty walls, the ground is so raised in the centre as to permit the patients to enjoy a view of the surrounding country, while a border, sloping towards the walls, secures them from an escape.

The offices for brewing, baking, cooking, and washing, are so detached as not to incommode the patients; and the range of baths, of which there is a cold plunging bath, a warm bath, a vapour bath, and a shower bath, set apart for each sex, is erected under a separate roof, to avoid damp and other inconveniences. One portion of the building is appropriated to the observance of divine service on Sundays. Here a domestic chaplain (a licensed minister of the Established Church) attends, and reads the service of the Church of England, with a sermon, to all such of the patients as are able to be present: but although both sexes are equally within sight of the clergyman, they are so arranged as not to be permitted to see each other. At the lower end of the airing-grounds, there is a range of apartments belonging to each class, wherein the more violent and noisy are secluded during their excitement. These rooms are all lighted from the roof, and the furniture being fixed into the walls and floors, the most furious cases may be trusted in those apartments, without any necessity for personal confinement. The individuals of one class are not allowed to have any intercourse with those of others in their different houses: as the accommodations vary in proportion to the class, this arrangement prevents invidious comparisons: it is gratifying, by respecting the predilections of persons as to rank in society; and it is useful, by preventing persons of rank and quality from an indiscriminate association with those of inferior manners and condition, which other-

wise on their mutual recovery might lead to inconvenient, if not detrimental acquaintance.

Although engaged in advocating the propriety of treating this disease *en masse*, and although they cannot shrink from expressing their opinion, that most species of insanity are more easily cured by the management that is adopted in an asylum, than by any other method that can be pursued in a private house; the proprietors are nevertheless aware that there are some cases in which it may be more judicious to avoid the former, and to place the patient at some little distance from scenes that may engage too much of his attention. For such persons there are upon the estate houses, of which the annexed prints are specimens, some of which are at present inhabited by members of the nobility, who are accommodated with servants from the institution; and are allowed to pursue any style of living and expense as to carriages, horses, &c. most suitable to their former habits, and not inconsistent with their present situation.

Many of the houses and cottages in the neighbouring parishes are also fitted up and appropriated to this purpose, and are more particularly adapted for those patients whose cases do not require that painful measure, a separation from their own family circle.















## CHAPTER II.

It would be foreign to the object of this little publication, to detail the symptoms, or to investigate the causes of mental disease ; nor would the proprietors enter at all into the principles that guide their practice, were it not that some prejudices still exist against that particular method of treating insanity, which is pursued in these institutions. And although their own success has hitherto been so well appreciated by the public, as to render any defence of this system unnecessary in their case ; still they cannot resist this opportunity of briefly setting forth those reasons which induce them, as unprejudiced medical men, to prefer the treatment of the insane, as practised in lunatic asylums, to any that can be adopted in private houses.

Insanity prevails more extensively than is commonly understood ; and its cure depends much more upon moral and physical management, than upon direct medical treatment. These means, as well as perfect security, and a great degree of liberty to the patient, are seldom attainable in a private family. It is of importance to remove the insane from their own houses and friends, not only on account of the distress and confusion that they produce, and of the positive danger that may sometimes ensue ; but also because the circumstances which excite the maniacal paroxysms, are more frequently found to exist at home than elsewhere ; and the disordered mind accumulates delusion upon delusion, from the habitual impressions and associations of ideas, emotions, and recollections, incessantly renewed there : for instance, one of the most common features of mental disease is an inveterate dislike to, or apprehension of, the nearest and dearest friends ; on which account the patient is often found to submit much more patiently to the control of a stranger, than to that of relations or of dependents, who are timid and unskilful, and from affection naturally reluctant to impose restraint, and thus frequently more calculated to inflame than to allay irritation.

When arrived within these walls, the patient who has probably been subjected to more or less previous confinement, experiences an immediate and grateful change in his situation. All personal coercion is suspended, he is conducted to a spacious room, and has constant access to the open air. The attendants, who are so arranged as to be able to entertain a constant unobserved surveillance, do not unnecessarily interfere ; but permit the indulgence of many innocent vagaries, in which, because they were

symptoms of insanity, he had been checked, thwarted, and thus constantly irritated, at home. Habits of the greatest simplicity and regularity are practiced and acquired, and the almost invariable consequence is, that the general health immediately improves.

The degree of toleration, deference, or pity, which even the most refractory or arrogant patient is frequently known to display towards his insane associates, at the same time that his conduct towards the individual who may be entrusted with his care, may be supercilious and most violent, is often found to supersede all necessity for the direct interference of the superintendent. And in the same manner, those who are becoming convalescent, will, for the sake of their own comfort, and sometimes for a more praiseworthy motive, seek to acquire an influence over their more intemperate companions, which is often beneficial to both parties. In short, the directors of this concern have no hesitation in declaring their conviction, that the patients derive almost as much benefit from their influence over each other, as from the combined influence of the most acute reasoning, and of the most active and skilful application of medical remedies.

It is an old and too true a remark, that this disease is not much within the influence of such remedies as those last mentioned ; but as it falls to the lot of many medical men to be consulted upon these cases, in instances where the advantages of a lunatic asylum cannot immediately be obtained, it is hoped that a few remarks upon the line of treatment which should be pursued upon the first manifestation of insanity, will not be misplaced.

In all other organs except the brain, when we observe signs of irritation or excitement, we infer as a necessary consequence, that there is a phlogosis requiring the use of antiphlogistics ; but with respect to the nervous system, it is in many, if not in most cases, quite otherwise. Thus, symptoms of excitement may exist, the patient is usually bled, and the symptoms generally become aggravated in proportion as the patient is reduced. In this asylum such cases are often admitted, which have become progressively worse under this active treatment, and in which the intellectual faculties are gradually restored under the influence of preparations of iron, antispasmodic remedies, and a steady perseverance in the use of those moral agents, which are alluded to in a subsequent part of this paper.

But while the proprietors are far from wishing to insinuate, that in the present advanced stage of medical knowledge there are many practitioners, who are ignorant that the functions of the brain may be disturbed without the existence of inflammation, they complain that the line of treatment usually adopted betrays a forgetfulness of this important fact ; and that it is too common to find that their medical brethren do not take into calculation the sympathetic reactions which so frequently occur between the brain and other organs. Now it is only by a most minute examination of these sym-

pathies, that medicine can be brought to bear upon the infinite varieties of insanity ; and, by detecting irregularities in the systems of circulation, respiration, digestion, &c. they are often enabled to remove those aggravated cases of insanity, which by more superficial observers would be attributed to inflammation of the brain. They would suggest, therefore, that a violent disturbance of the cerebral functions, unless accompanied by the obvious symptoms of meningeal inflammation, is not to be treated in the same manner as is a case of pneumonia, or of peritonitis : and, on account of the incessant vigilance which is demanded, they are emboldened to urge the instant removal of the insane, to that situation where alone they are secure of the constant supervision of a medical adviser. After declaring their conviction of the necessity of this immediate separation from the family circle, and the well known fact, that the cases which are eventually cured bear a relative proportion to the degree of time which has been allowed to elapse before such removal, the proprietors assert, that many of the most favourable results which have occurred in their practice ought to be mainly attributed to the constant succession of bodily exercise, and to the variety of mental recreation, which is provided for their patients. To accomplish this end, the estate at Brislington affords abundant occupation for those who are able to engage in agricultural or horticultural pursuits. It is supplied with a bowling-green, grounds for cricket, foot-ball, and other athletic amusements ; and in the proper season, parties with greyhounds extend their walks round the neighbouring country in search of game. Within doors is a billiard-room, and chess and other games afford evening recreation for both sexes. It is more difficult to engage the females in much bodily exercise ; but, besides a daily promenade and the regulated use of musical instruments, it is found easy to interest this portion of the patients in mechanical occupations, which, next to muscular exertions in the open air, may be considered as the most favourable employment for the insane.

Some merit may be claimed to this institution as having been the first to establish regular divine service among its inmates. In fact, it was in consequence of Dr. Fox's evidence before a committee of the House of Lords, that this excellent custom has been enforced by the late act of parliament in all public and private asylums. On that occasion he asserted what subsequent experience in this institution has fully justified ; viz. "that although he could not record any marked advance in religion among his inmates ; still, during the service the deranged appearances are suspended, and the patients tranquillized by the display of order and decorum to such a degree, that the chaplain (curate of this parish) has often expressed his astonishment, and has quoted the sobriety and quietness of this little community, as a pattern to his own parochial congregation." It need scarcely be added, that Roman Catholics, Uni-



tarians, and members of the Society of Friends, are not permitted to attend, except with the express wish of their relations, but on all proper occasions their own ministers are invited to visit them, with the consent of their friends.

A domestic library is maintained for the use of the patients; and such as are not contented with this supply are permitted to subscribe to a circulating library in Bristol.

The convalescents often spend the evening in the family circle of one of the proprietors, where any eccentricities are observed upon and checked with more consideration and delicacy than they might meet with, if thrown into more general society.

As the attendants contribute essentially to the success of every plan of treatment pursued in reference to the insane, they are selected with the greatest care, and are not permitted to have any control over the patients, until they have gained some experience in inferior departments of the institution, and have proved their good temper and forbearance. In order to ensure, as far as possible, the good conduct of these persons, they all sign an agreement upon admission, part of which is to the following effect, viz.

“The Drs. Fox engage to give a month’s wages, or a month’s warning; but any departure from the above agreement, *cruelty, improper language, or other misconduct towards the patients*, will warrant an immediate dismissal without reference to the above terms.”

The clothing and personal comforts of the patients are under the particular care of Mrs. Francis Fox, who takes an active part in all the domestic concerns of the establishment.

To procure the admission of a patient into this asylum, it is necessary that two medical men shall have previously visited, and *separately* examined such person, and have given a certificate of the existence of insanity. Proper printed forms of these certificates can be procured, by application, directed to Drs. Francis and Charles Fox, Brislington House, near Bristol, the first of whom resides in the asylum, and the latter in a separate house upon the estate.

Such then have been the history and progress, such is the present state, and such are the principles and the practice, of this asylum. Let it be remembered that its ends and purposes are to be both a hospital for the curable, and a comfortable retreat for the incurable; but its principal merit is this, that when the lunatic enters these doors, hope is not excluded; returning health of mind, convalescence, and complete cure, are not looked upon as hopeless events and useless expectations. These form the objects, the studies, the labours, of the proprietors, and the Almighty has hitherto been pleased to bless these labours in very numerous instances.















































